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The Othering of Islam in a European Context

Polarizing Discourses in Swedish-Language Dailies in Finland

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Abstract

Media representations of Islam mostly appear in the Finnish media in connection with events in other parts of the world. In this context, Islam is often treated as something distant and ascribed the role of the Other. These representations function as definers for collective categorizations, having an impact on which categories for self-identifications are relevant in specific cases. The aim of the present article is to discuss othering discourses on Islam in Swedish-language dailies in Finland on the basis of the debate following the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. These discourses build upon a broader tradition of othering and have a great deal in common with medieval representations, thus the othering of Islam in a historical perspective is also briefly discussed.

Keywords: media representations, Islam, discourses, stereotypes, Europe, opinion journalism

Introduction

The media contribute to the production and maintenance of discourses[1] that effect our daily lives and create the surroundings in which our knowledge of ourselves and the world is formed – the media unite the subjectively experienced with collective praxis (Real 1989, 15). Media representations and common perceptions of Islam form each other reciprocally –common perceptions are visible in the media and at the same time as media representations influence how common perceptions form and change. Thus, the media mirror, manifest and confirm competing societal and political discourses, at the same time as they have an impact on how future fields of meanings are constructed and in a broader sense on the directions in which society may develop. The media discourses also operate within the common world of knowledge of the individual, forming his/her conceptions of the surrounding world by establishing what is considered positive or negative, good or bad. This article discusses discourses on Islam that are reproduced by Swedish-language dailies in Finland and the broader historical context of these discourses.

The globalization of information technology has brought the media public into a global public sphere (Volkmer 2001, 69). This means not only a greater involvement in events in other parts of the world, but also a reassessment of one's own position in the enlarged society. Media representations of Islam are visible in the Finnish everyday public sphere on a local basis, for example in relation to discussions about a "multicul-

tural" society, but they are to a larger extent actualized outside the immediate surroundings, in connection with events in different corners of the world – generally conflict related (Raittila et al. 2007). Thus these media representations create pictures of "the outside world" at the same time as they are part of the constructions of categories for self-identification – the rhetoric of global issues and polemics, for example "the War on Terrorism", raises questions as to "whom do I represent" and "who represents me" to the media public. Although there is an awareness of the "propaganda machinery" behind political polemics of this kind, the rhetoric may still affect the individual's picture of the world. In the debate that is analysed here, Europe is the common denominator for self-identification and the othering of Islam. This is interesting, because the global dimensions, without any direct relation to the everyday life of Finnish society, could be considered as lacking importance for the collective identification of the Swedish-speaking minority, but instead of referring to "Finnishness" or the language minority, the emphasis throughout the material is on perceptions of Europe or "the Western world" as entities for collective identification.

My empirical material consists of newspaper articles covering the debate about the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, from seven Swedish-language dailies from Finland during the period 10.12.2005-9.5.2006. I have analysed the material using qualitative methods focusing on discursive formations of polarization in which Islam is depicted as the Other – as an antipode to Europe or "the Western world". These discourses overlap and build on each other, but differ to the extent that they can be described as different categories. In these discourses, the role of Islam in European history is neglected, and Islam is generalized and simplified – Islam includes a variety of traditions, interpretations and cultural routines. Religionization is also a central aspect – the emphasis is on religion even in cases where aspects other than religion are more relevant.

I will begin this article by discussing the production of collective knowledge and categories of inclusion and exclusion. I will then present central findings from the analysed media texts, and finally discuss the othering of Islam from a historical perspective. Within this frame, the polarizing discourses of Islam are produced and maintained, and the discourses on their part maintain these perceptions. The purpose of the present article is thus both to analyse the dichotomizing discourses in the debate and to discuss their wider historical context.

Othering Discourses and the Construction of Boundaries

Society constitutes the fund of knowledge from which the individual abstracts the material for his conception of the world. The subject's reality is built on different interpretations and applications of subjective perceptions and discourses present in society. Only a small part of the substance on which the Self and the worldview are based is gained through one's own experiences – the greater part is mediated through the social world (Berger et al. 1971, 69-89; Heiskala 2000, 100-103; Saaristo et al. 2005, 100-104; Schütz 2002, 37-39; Sevänen 2004, 6-8). Communication mediates our relation to reality, at the same time as it connects us with the predominant social terms, customs and structures of power (Kunelius 1998, 10-11). During acts of communication, expressions are chosen from the collective stock of knowledge that is based on the collective memory, at the same time as this stock is rebuilt through the act of communication. In this sense, history and ideology are always present as unconscious but constantly renewable structures (Raittila 2004, 42-43).

The relation between a text and the surrounding society is reciprocal; at the same time as the texts are formed socio-culturally, they affect their environment by reproducing or reforming prevalent perceptions (Fairclough 1997, 51). In history writing and news reporting, a causal relationship between the texts is created – these are chosen and presented with the aim to create a continuous narrative in which repeated structures can be filled with meanings (Hietala 2006, 96-97). Every story, and the effect it has, is only an interpretation of the world; the ingredients are gained from the stock of available information, and structured consciously and unconsciously in ways that benefit the aim of the topic.

The historical context contains significant information about the case per se, and by analysing the case one can also acquire knowledge of the social surroundings. Historical representations are therefore relevant in striving for an understanding of media representations. The discursive whole that the texts build up is significant; when an individual reads a text or is part of conversation, previously acquired knowledge is activated. The subject moves between different worlds of experience, submitted to different terms, negotiating his/her own position – when we read, the reality within the specific context is brought to the fore, and conceptions in this setting are activated, as are the notions of the Self (Karvonen 2004, 59-80). Thus, some categories ascribed to the Self (identification) are active within specific contexts, as for example when a protestant Swedish-speaking Finn reads about Islam in the world news and unconsciously positions himself as a representative of Europe or "the Western World".

Otherness and Categorizations of the Self

The human world is marked by imaginary boundaries, but our unawareness of what lies behind these boundaries leads us to misinterpretations and fallacious categorizations (Bauman et al. 2004, 54-55). Social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen sees categorization as a human tendency. To be able to orientate in this complex world, the individual constructs systems and organizes his/her surroundings, at the same time as he/she creates meanings and the context for his/her actions (Eriksen 1998, 128-133). The Self is both surrounded by and conscious of the interacting subjects, and structures its social spheres – the Self identifies itself with an Us, and a We can only exist when there is consciousness of a Them (Schütz 1982, 32-33; Schütz 2002, 41-42; Bauman 1992, 53; Bauman et al. 2004, 47-48).

In relation to the discussion of boundaries between subjects or collectives, *otherness* is a central theme. The distinction between difference and otherness is that difference is descriptive, whereas otherness is strategic. Otherness describes the distribution of power; the differences between known and unknown are not mediated equally or neutrally, othering always refers to the other party being repressed in a relation. When the Other is being judged, the emphasis is on what differentiates instead of what connects. The encounter with the Other is dominated by our preconceptions, which depend on public representations (Löytty 2005a, 162-182; Löytty 2005b, 89-90). The less one knows about distinct people, the easier one interprets these people through presupposed characteristics; the "knowledge" and perceptions one gains are stabilized as simplifications and stereotypes that become part of the common stock of knowledge through inter-subjective activity (Ålund 1999, 48-49).

When the world perceived by the individual widens from the immediate surroundings to a global perspective, the individual has to re-define his/her own position, taking into

consideration the new context. Nationalism is a central ideological aspect of boundary making and can be seen as a mental structure that organizes our thoughts, the central task being to categorize the complexity of "reality". However, regarding the discussion of Islam in a global perspective, the nation seems to be of less importance as a source of identification (Creutz-Kämppi 2007). Europe instead is given the role of an entity where "one's own and the right" values and traditions are to be found – the We category as a collective refers to "Europeans". Although nationalism and europeism can be simultaneously active on different levels within the individual, europeism can be studied as a form of nationalism – concerning substance and structure it follows the same patterns. By emphasizing some values, norms and cultural attributes, a common denominator for collective identification is constructed, and is given a meaning beyond the immediate content.

The discussion about nationalism can be brought to a supranational level, where the substance for identification may be more vaguely defined, but it still springs from the conception of a defined collective – which in the case of Europe is an institutionalized concept. When the Finnish public debate in relation to Islam is often positioned on a supranational level, europeism functions as a defining factor in the categorization of the surrounding world. The relevant aspect is thus how the individual defines him-/herself and with whom he/she identifies him-/herself – not to what extent he/she actually is part of or related to this category. The feeling of belonging is based on subjective perceptions of the surrounding world and the available views of reality.

Polarization is a strategic form of boundary making. The Other is not only a stereotype of what is unfamiliar and excluded, but also an opposite in the sense of self-categorization – an imaginary collective gets its distinct form and substance when it is mirrored against the idea of an outer collective. The aspect of exclusion is characteristic for the construction of unities; the negative aspect of identification appears when the Other is depicted as a threatening stranger, not when difference is presented per se. The dichotomy between the Self and the Other has been central to the construction of the idea of Europe, and throughout history Islam has often been given the role of the Other (Delanty 1995, 4-6, 23-29).

Representations of Islam in a Public Debate – An Analysis of the Discourses of Otherness in Opinion Journalism

I have studied the public debate in the Swedish-speaking dailies in Finland that followed the publishing of the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, focusing on the othering discourses visible in opinion journalism (Creutz-Kämppi 2007).[2] The total material consisted of all articles mentioning Islam or Muslims from the period 10.12.2005-9.5.2006, covering seven Swedish-speaking newspapers. These articles were analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods (coding, discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis). Here, I will present some central findings of the discourse analysis. The material for this analysis consisted of the editorials, the columns and the letters to the editor. It is important to bear in mind that the articles are part of a debate, which implies that opinions may be presented in an exaggerated form – the language being more colourful and caricatured than the terminology used in news-reports and notices, and the arguments more polemic. However, the debate provides a useful basis for a study of repeated themes and rhetorical choices. I have analysed the aspects of othering to gain insight into how otherness is constructed in relation to Islam. The debate also included positive aspects – voices that criticized polarization, dichotomous models of thought

and discriminatory argumentation; in these texts, an effort was made to overcome a way of thinking in dichotomies, and openness and respect were stressed.

In the material, myths about Islam as a violent or backward religion are strongly present. Although the aspect of exaggeration is occasionally easy to perceive, stereotypes such as these may unconsciously form categories in the subjects' conception of reality, and these are more seldom questioned. As well as the othering, media representations of Islam and Muslims create a specific kind of picture of Islam and Muslims, and they also have an influence on the kinds of categories for self-identifications that are produced – defining "a Westerner" or "a European" (Said 1995, 75-77). In the articles, the discourses of otherness separate Islam from Europe and "the Western World"[3], but mention nothing about Finland – the categories for self-identification are those of Europe, not of the state. Interestingly, the themes on which the ideological aspects of Europe are built in the texts – such as concepts of civilization and modernity – are quite distant from daily life and from the subjective sphere of experience. This shows the role of the collective sphere of information, as for example the media, as it offers means for categorization of the Self and the surrounding world, and structures for gaining and establishing a specific worldview. The cartoons were not published in the newspapers in Finland, and the demonstrations in Finland following the publications abroad were peaceful. Still, throughout the material, the situation is depicted as a conflict between *Us* and *Them* – *Us* being a European or "Western" collective and *Them* being Muslims.

The othering of Islam is a central aspect in the analysed articles, and the basis for this dichotomization is a conception of belonging to a specific collective, distinct from Islam. Although the concepts used are the same within the different discourses, their substance varies to some extent – the Enlightenment is the central definer for what "European" stands for in most of the discourses, but some arguments are additionally based on notions from the Christian humanist tradition. I have distinguished four repeated othering discourses: *the discourse of violence*, *the colonialist discourse*, *the discourse of secularization* and *the discourse of the clash of civilizations*. I will briefly present these discourses below (for a more detailed presentation, see Creutz-Kämppi 2007).

I. The discourse of violence: Following the attacks on the World Trade Centre, the terminology used in media coverage concerning Islam has to a growing extent come to be connected with terrorism and political violence; historical conflicts are brought up to show that there is some kind of "natural leaning" towards violence in Islam (Akar 2004, 18). The aspect of religionization is central here – Islam is brought up as an explanation for the violence, regardless of the context. In the analysed writings, violence is seen as something connected to religion or culture. Muslims are depicted as a coherent group – aggressive and threatening, or with a tendency towards these attributes. Strong and charged words are used. The following quotation is from a text in which the author criticizes the actions of the Danish imams in connection with the caricatures.

1. "Instead they incited the mob in a series of countries to bring the whole of our legal system to its knees for their culture of violence and for Sharia[4] by using violence and threats of murder."

   Demonstrating Muslims are called "rabble" and "mob". The words "violence" and "threat" are used repeatedly. The Sharia is always mentioned in negative contexts. Quotation 2 is a typical example of the discourse of violence, both concerning the

representation of Muslims and Islam – it also resembles the medieval polemics of the Crusades, where Muslims were often pictured as decapitating infidels.

2. “How far are we ready to go, to avoid provoking an aggressive Muslim opinion? Do we have to accept the prohibition to question religious sets of values at all? Even when somebody cuts the throat of odious “non-believers” with reference to God’s commandments?”

   As mentioned earlier, Muslims are repeatedly depicted as a uniform group, connected to emotionally charged attributes and verbs – such as “screaming” and “brawling”, or “furious” and “threatening” crowds. Terms used to describe the demonstrators were, for example, “fierce Muslims”, “Syrian troublemakers” and “a many-headed mob”; the reactions and demonstrations were described as: “the raging Islamic reaction”, “the Islamic world explodes in fury”, “the rage of many Islamic countries” and so on. The actions were often described in an index-like manner, as in the next quotation:

3. “Who would have imagined half a year ago that millions of Muslims throughout the world would demonstrate against Denmark, burn Dannebrogen /the Danish flag/ and trample on it, burn dolls depicting the Danish Prime Minister, attack the embassies and threaten the cartoonists with death and boycott Danish dairy products?”

   It is frequently emphasized that, for example, Christians never would act in a similar way, and in this discourse, “Europeans”, who always bear the prefix “us” in the texts, are depicted as rationally thoughtful and sensible. Regardless of attempts at some kind of understanding, the arguments still spring from a preconception that there is a tendency for Muslims to become “fundamentalist and dangerous”, and it is also taken for granted that this preconception is conceived in this way.

4. “One might think that Muslims would not turn so fundamentalist and dangerous if the girls dressed like their western sisters. In reality the reactions would probably be exactly the opposite.”

   Arguments of this kind would hardly be used in connection with other religions. Another example of this type of reversed reasoning is when the Finnish Muslims are described in connection with the demonstrations:

5. “Luckily it has been less important for them to explain their case with violence or to tell other people to burn in hell”

   One may ask why it should be presumed that it could be in someone’s interest to explain something with violence. The Prophet Muhammad is also targeted in the debate, as has been the case in polemics against Islam since the Middle Ages (Cardini 2001, 11).

6. “The cartoons might be tasteless, but the part that depicts Muhammad as a terrorist might not be entirely without a point.”

   Within this discourse, the “European” represents a sensible and placidly deliberating individual, while the “Muslims” are ascribed the roles of fanatic and irrational masses with a tendency towards violence – the polarization is based on a picture of Islam as aggressive and threatening.

II. The colonialist discourse: In the colonialist discourse, Muslims are depicted as incapable of managing by themselves, and Islam is presented as socio-culturally backward. The values of the Enlightenment are used for judging Islam, but with Christian humanist principles and a patronizing attitude – Muslims are seen as a collective in need of enlightenment. The tone is reformist; the task of "the West" as "more advanced" is to help the "Islamic world", both politically and ideologically. The focus within this discourse is on Islam as underdeveloped – this conception also has its roots in medieval continental representations of Islam, which place Islam "outside the civilized world" (Smith 1999, 322). The spread of values from the Enlightenment is offered as a solution to the "problems" – which is also seen as a way to inhibit the spread of "incorrect values" within Europe.

7. "What the Muslim world needs are not insults, but calming doses of enlightenment, freedom of speech and democracy."

   The tone is superior and brings to mind the colonialist polemic of "the white man's burden". In addition to "helping" and "developing", it is also stressed that European countries already have helped "the Islamic world", as in the next example:

8. "The ironic thing is that the hate of the Islamists has been directed against the small nations that probably have helped the Muslims most during recent decades. Both with financial support and hospitality."

   Europe is not only seen as "helping Muslims" economically, but also by accepting immigrants. It is repeatedly asked why these people cannot understand that "the Western World" is on their side. The religious and political leaders are pointed out as the primary problem, and "bad leaders" who lead the people astray with their poor judgment are frequently discussed – for example using terms such as "non-independent servants" led by "Islamist dictators".

9. "There has to be a target for frustrated and poor people. Now Islamic leaders help the people find targets by pointing them out unequivocally."

   It is emphasized that with *Our* help, and within the framework of *Our* society, *They* can become like *Us*. Pictures of Islam as underdeveloped have been typical stereotypes in continental European writings for centuries (Cardini 2001, 3). Muslims are depicted as a collective, unable to decide over their own matters and without control over their own feelings. The picture shows masses manipulated by "bad leaders" that are led by their own interests, unable to understand that they are being used. It is also emphasized at times that these groups of people are not dangerous, only a bit immature:

10. "The significance of screaming demonstrators who burn flags should not be exaggerated, however" /…/ " They always do this, it is only a way of venting one's feelings."

11. "They do not intend it to be that bad" /…/ "They only want to protest a little"

    Within the colonialist discourse, Islam is ascribed the role of the backward Other, which can be developed with the help of "the Western World", and cease to be a potential problem. The arguments are one-sided and coloured by a feeling of superiority. In this discourse, Islam represents primitiveness, and Europe modernity. Muslims are

depicted as an underdeveloped and helpless mass, while the task of the "European" is to try to help or support Islam in "reaching enlightenment".

III. The discourse of secularization: Like the colonialist discourse, the discourse of secularization is also based on values from the philosophy of the enlightenment. However, strategically the question is not one of "reforming Islam" – the starting points are a critical air, a negative attitude towards religions, and occasionally even a scolding tone. The premises are ideological – religion is seen as a problem and "the secularized West" is seen as holding universally valid values and norms. While Islam is seen within the colonialist discourse as "harmless, but backwards", the discourse of secularization presents a more threatening picture of two antipodes. In the texts, there is an emphasis on "not giving in". Paradoxically, specific values of the Enlightenment are called "holy" and occasionally the value-system has a religious outlook, at the same time as religious values are held in contempt.

12. "In the sense that it is possible to find any arguments of the perpetrators of the outrage, it is that in Islam it is forbidden to portray the Prophet Muhammad. But in a democratic society there are no picture bans. Criticizing God, Allah and any other deity is a right in the democratic and enlightened part of the world. It is even an important right, with an important function."

    Arguments such as these are typical of the discourse of secularization; it is defined what one can do, and this is absolute. The importance of a critical attitude to what is held as holy is frequently stressed, although this seems to be the case only with regard to the values of the Other. At the same time, the attitude towards the norms that are referred to, such as freedom of speech and the rules of democracy, has a strong emotional connotation and the philosophy of the Enlightenment is praised. In a few cases, the well-known quote "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it" is used[5].

13. "When the wrath and fear have calmed down little by little and apologies have been exchanged, we will be able to state: The satire is a fundamental right in our culture. Everything and everyone can be portrayed. Keeping nothing as holy is our holy right."

    The othering plays a central role in this discourse as well: *We* have the right values – *They* cannot see this as they are blinded by their religion. The tone is superior, when "Western rationality" is in question – the talk is about "achievements that must not be questioned".

14. "But in principle it can't be prohibited for a non-Muslim to publish pictures of Muhammad. Not even pictures with a satiric view on Islamism as a totalitarian ideology. We Europeans have taken the right to place ourselves above religious authorities. It has taken a few hundred years. This right must not be negotiable."

    Within the discourse of secularization, "law" is positioned as an opposite to "emotions", as characteristics of a polarized worldview. The law represents "the rational and secularized European", while Muslims are presented as basing all arguments on "religious and irrational feelings". The law is seen above all as *subjective* and *emotional*. In some of the texts, it is sarcastically suggested that the Qur'an and the law

should be set against each other, to see which applies here. “Western” and “Islamic” values are seen as incompatible.

15. “But for prime ministers – or other politicians for that matter – to officially apologize for something published in newspapers or on the web does not go together with what generally is called Western democracy. The limits of freedom of speech shall ultimately be decided by courts, not by prime ministers and definitely not by a manipulated mob on the streets, be it in Damascus, Beirut or Copenhagen.”

    Central to the discourse of secularization is the dichotomy between Europe as a rational and enlightened community and Islam as an irrational and backwards collective. As in all the othering discourses, Muslims are represented as masses – in this discourse though as a bit more threatening than in the colonialist discourse, although there are close points of similarity between them, such as statements about Islam being backward and subordinate to the enlightened “West”. Islam, however, is not presented as a physical threat as in the discourse of violence, but as an ideological threat – as a threat to the “right values”. The statements are unconditional: *We* have our world of ideas, *They* have theirs – and these are incompatible; for Islam to be a part of Europe, an assimilation towards “Western conceptions” is expected.

IV. The discourse of the clash of the civilizations: It is polemized in an article by Samuel P. Huntington (1993) and later in the book The Clash of Civilizations (1996) that the fundamental conflicts in the time after the Cold War will be of a ”cultural” nature. Huntington’s polarizing speculations place the global conflicts between the nations and specific civilizations, and he states that these will dominate global politics. Huntington focuses in his texts on “the conflict between Islam and the Western nations”; these theses have been criticized as islamophobic and self-fulfilling, but have still received a large distribution – also on a political level, for example within NATO (Linjakumpu 1999, 99). This discourse has a central position in the public debate following the caricatures: Islam is presented as an ideological and threatening antipode – a war of religions or cultures is presented as a field of vision.

16. “One can naturally try to look beyond the actual conflict with traditional western analysis. That it is a question of something more fundamental than only the lacking of respect for religious symbols is not difficult to interpret. More difficult for the ones that try to understand it is to admit that religion here is being used to escalate even further the polarity between the two ideologies. The fundamental question is whether there are in the parties enough moderate forces that truly want to respect each other to prohibit the war from moving to the second and maybe determinant stage.”

    Occasionally it is also suggested that even though many organizations are taking advantage of the situation, there is still no actual threat of war:

17. “Why chaos should burst out five months after the publishing was incomprehensible. Small incidents have sometimes started powerful processes, but still there is no one who believes that the last battle between Christianity and Islam now would be imminent.” /.../ “One has to play it cool. And to learn how to count. Right now one can state, for example, that the Muslim world cannot win a war of religions. One can sabotage one’s income from oil and turn off the lights in the West for a while, but not win.”

Christianity, the Enlightenment and "the West" are used synonymously. Sometimes the tone is frightening, sometimes arrogant, as in the quotation above. It is prophesized that giving up on specific norms may be a symptom of a greater threat.

18. "Are we ready to pay the price to reach an end to the protests? Especially as the conflict between the Western World and the Muslim world now seems to be so deep, that there surely are enough other sparks that lighten powder magazines after the cartoons have fallen into oblivion."

    The editorial "Cartoons catalyst of West contra Islam friction" emphasizes that after the Cold War, it was thought that the antagonism between "east and west" would be replaced by one between north and south, but in actuality the main antagonism is now taking place between "the Western world and the Muslim world".

19. "How might the friction afterwards be described? May God – and Allah – forbid that it one day will be called the third world war. It is not a war between religions, not even in the forms of "Islam against all others". The religion is of course an underlying cause, but it seems to be about a cultural clash of a larger sort. Islam is not homogeneous either; the doctrines and interpretations vary greatly. Unfortunately this is not a cold war, as it claims victims on a daily basis. It is a warm war – yes, hot here and there."

    Within the discourse of the clash of civilizations, reactions to the publishing of the cartoons were seen as part of a larger "cultural struggle" between Islam and "the West". It is frequently emphasized that the reactions had little to do with the cartoons – these simply triggered events that would have occurred anyway. The polemics here are not only simplifying and generalizing, they also activate polarizing conceptions about Islam as "the real enemy of the West". Within this discourse, a dichotomy is made between "Islam" and "the West", as civilization antipodes, the representation of Muslims being as an "undefined Islamic community". The foundation for this discourse is both a normative ideological polemic, and a polemic about Islam as dangerous. The aspect of danger and the concept of war are central. In some of the texts, there is even an apocalyptic tone when speculating about "the friction of the present situation". As for the other othering discourses presented in this analysis, interaction and coexistence are not brought up, except in a few cases, when talking about the need for the Other to adjust.

Othering Discourses of Islam in a Historical Perspective

In the analysed debate, Islam is ascribed roles as a violent or a backward religion. These perceptions are not only visible when studying the media – they are central elements of a wider tradition of othering Islam. These same conceptions have defined the typical stereotype of Muslims for centuries, although the societies have varied greatly. I will now briefly present some central elements of conceptions of Islam from a historical perspective, in order to show how specific discourses have gained foothold over a longer period of time.

Knowledge about Islam was very vague in Europe until the twelfth century, when the situation changed due to the Crusades, and the mythical stories of the crusaders (Armour 2002, 51). During the Middle Ages, people acquired knowledge about Islam from discourses produced and reproduced in stories and songs, the agenda being to justify and

promote the crusades. During this time, the traditions of song and drama were central to the production of knowledge, as the majority of Europeans were illiterate. Muslims played a central role in the *chanson de geste* – poetry, where racist myths and polarizing polemics on Islam worked as strategic justification for the battles against Islam (Cardini 2001, 11; Goody 2004, 69-71; Männistö 1999, 57-58). Although the European intelligentsia thought highly of Islam because of the strong tradition of science in Islam, there were contrary conceptions among the people, who depicted Muslims as backward and uncivilized. From time to time, Muslims were also represented as aggressive and fanatic, both by the people and the elite. Irrespective of what kind of polemics was used, the majority of the conceptions about Islam were based on a dichotomization between Us and Them (Männistö 1999, 52; Smith 1999, 321-322).

Although there were Christian and Muslim scholars who were in dialogic relations in their writings, Islam was strongly targeted in continental Christian European writings – this discursive polarization was expressed in polemics with a religious connotation, about Islam as a heresy, as a violent and aggressive religion, as immoral, and by depicting Muhammad as a false prophet (Cardini 2001, 89). Although there was occasionally more insightful information about the religion and its founder, the discourses mostly spread negative stereotypes (Armour 2002, 52, 54-57; Gunny 2004, 53-59).

Because there was no information about Islam based on Muslim sources before the twelfth century, all available information was based on common conceptions (Armour 2002, 51). It is important to emphasize, however, that the picture of Islam varied widely based on geographical position: in Western Europe demonizing pictures of Islam dominated, but the conceptions among Christians in the Middle East – where interaction across religious boundaries were part of everyday life – differed greatly, according to Christian sources from the eight century (Hämeen-Anttila 2004, 31-32).

In connection with the advancement of the Ottoman Empire, the mythical fear earlier directed towards the "Saracens" (and also against the Spanish Mores) turned towards the Ottoman Turks. However, as the power of the Ottoman Empire started to fade out, the interest in "the East" increased. This curiosity broke through within the European art scene, and during the seventeenth and eighteenth century it started to take shape as exoticism (Männistö 1999, 55-63). This did not mean, however, that the polarizing discourses ceased to exist – they just partly changed, and only within specific spheres.

The conceptions of "Islam as dangerous" and "Islam as backward" have existed side by side. These conceptions about the Other (and simultaneously about "one's own") are anchored in discourses within the common stock of knowledge – discourses that the media make available for the individual. Anssi Männistö, researcher in journalism, emphasizes the importance of studying media representations of Islam in a historical perspective. One of the central myths of the 1990s has been the conception of Islam as a civilisatory threat against "the West"; according to Männistö, racism in Europe is clearly directed against Islam. One reason for this is the stereotypes in the media – conceptions of Muslims as a violent mass, or of Islam as backward and hierarchically subordinate to "Western hegemony". Männistö also criticizes the fact that the role of Islam in Europe throughout the history is overlooked or denied. The polarization, however, has had an essential function within the construction and maintenance of the idea of Europe and European categories of identification (Männistö 1999, 1-4, 38).

The representations of today have a great deal in common with medieval representations. Common stereotypes compete with ethnocentric ideas of dominance in the media, even though these do not exclude each other – they support each other, as they

maintain the same dichotomization, they act within the same field and reproduce and maintain the same othering discourses. Europe is also used synonymously with "the West" or "the Western world", and a distorted distinction is made between "the modern" and Islam – this conception connects "the West" with modernity, while Islam is seen as something backward (Cardini 2001, 1-3). This is highly relevant in the case of the Finnish public sphere, as a large number of media topics are based on European news sources and dominant discourses (Creutz-Kämppi 2008). Some of the polemics used in connection with Europe would not be accepted within a national theme; moralizing and imperialistic sets of thoughts that would be pointed out as discriminatory are accepted within specific European discourses (Wæver, 1989, 284-285).

Epilogue

Collective representations are more than the sum of individual opinions – they form the network of social life, establishing meanings and creating feelings of belonging through communication and social interaction. Media as a stock of symbols and meanings play a central role within the production, maintenance and changing of collective representations, as ideas, categories, myths, values and systems of belief (Lundby 1997, 146-148).

A large part of the public discussion concerning Islam is conflict oriented (Akar 2004, 16; Raittila et al 2007). This is not a new phenomenon, even though inter-religious co-existence has worked without friction in most parts of the world. But at the same time, with the conflict-oriented worldview, there exist structures of thought with opposite premises – worlds of knowledge in which interaction is a routine and daily praxis. Islam has been an important part of Europe throughout history, since the arrival of the religion in Spain during the eight century to the world of today, and history has been defined by co-existence not only based on political and economic relations and structures prevailing through active trade on the Mediterranean, but as part of everyday life within Europe: in Barcelona, Palermo, Tirana, Athens, Budapest and Kiev and on Crimea, to name some regions where Islam has been a central factor (Goody 2004, 5-18). Europe has never been a solitary Christian territory – more accurately, the territory has been marked by a movement of cultural and social forms in multiple directions. Thus there are parallel worlds of knowledge with opposite premises, and for different individuals these form different realities.

The present article covers boundary making and polarizing as discursive activity – in its concrete form discourses of Islam as the Other. I have discussed different discursive themes – the discourse of violence, the colonialist discourse, the discourse of secularization and the discourse of the clash of civilizations – in which Muslims are depicted as the Other. These perceptions build on a broader tradition of othering – thus I have also briefly discussed their historical context. Our "worlds of knowledge" – "realities" – are constructed through inter-subjective activity; a central aspect is how these are naturalized – by appearing in a common daily form. When the individual swiftly flips through the pages of a newspaper at breakfast, previously formed conceptions are activated by frequently repeated themes.

Sometimes we rely upon the human capability to question information – it is emphasized that it is easy to see through rhetoric that is coloured by hidden agendas, failing to notice that polemics easily leaves a trail in the unconscious – especially when it has been naturalized and common, as in a public debate. Needless to say, the work of the researcher is also marked by his or her own ways of thinking. But with reflexive media

analysis, it is possible to identify features distinct in the society. And with a reflexive attitude towards all knowledge, the "common" newspaper reader may find a more open view of the world. The media offer a possibility of creating a more diverse "reality" – throughout history, dialogue has been the ground on which a shared future is built.

Notes

1. A discourse can be defined as a series of statements that offers a language for representing a specific form of knowledge about a topic; when statements about a specific theme are made within a specific discourse, the discourse enables a construction of the theme in a specific way, at the same time as it limits the other ways of constructing the theme. The discourse consists, in other words, of a series of inter-related statements, not defined according to the traditional division into thought and action, language and activity; the discourse is knowledge production within the language, created through social activity – discursive action creates meanings. The discourses do not function as static entities; they interact and produce webs of meanings (Hall 1992, 291-292). Within their own sets of rules, the discourses create their own representations of "reality"; they regulate how thoughts can be combined and what can be seen as causal. By analysing discourses, one is able to grasp the ways in which individuals give meaning to the world, and how the individuals experience the world (Väliverronen 1998, 17-18, 25).
2. The quotations in the present article are translated from Swedish by the author. For more details on the analysis and the original quotations – see Creutz-Kämppi 2007.
3. From a historical perspective, "the Western World" has referred to the Western [Roman] Empire, later it has come to be connected to the perception of Islam as an antipode to Europe, defined as "the Western World". With time, the United States came to be included, and in connection with the Cold War, it came to stand for an amount of geographically divided countries (the Western bloc) (Männistö 1999, 38). In the debate "the Western World" is used synonymously with Europe – however in the discourse of the clash of civilizations, it is used more widely (including for example the United States).
4. Sharia is a form of legal system based on the Qur'an.
5. These words were actually written by Evelyn Beatrice Hall, although most often credited to Voltaire, as in this debate.

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